

# Clear cut?

With school budgets getting close to breaking point, head teachers are resorting to desperate measures to keep their schools and nursery classes afloat. *Nicole Weinstein* reports

**S**piralling costs and growing pupil numbers have put schools across the country at risk of losing members of staff, reducing the amount of teacher training on offer and not being able to afford basic educational supplies such as text books and glue sticks.

'It's reached crisis point,' explains James Bowen, director of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) Edge. 'Heads are having to make some very difficult decisions. Ultimately, if they are being challenged to save up to £50,000, they're not going to do that by ordering a few fewer text books. That type of money is only achievable by making staff redundant. So, we are seeing many schools cut their teaching assistant budgets and a few schools have even announced plans to close the school early on a Friday so that all teachers have their planning, preparation and assessment time at the same time.'

Nursery classes are also under pressure to become sustainable, especially with the introduction of the 30

hours' free childcare. Some schools are even considering changing the age range of their school so that they don't have to employ a qualified teacher in the nursery class.

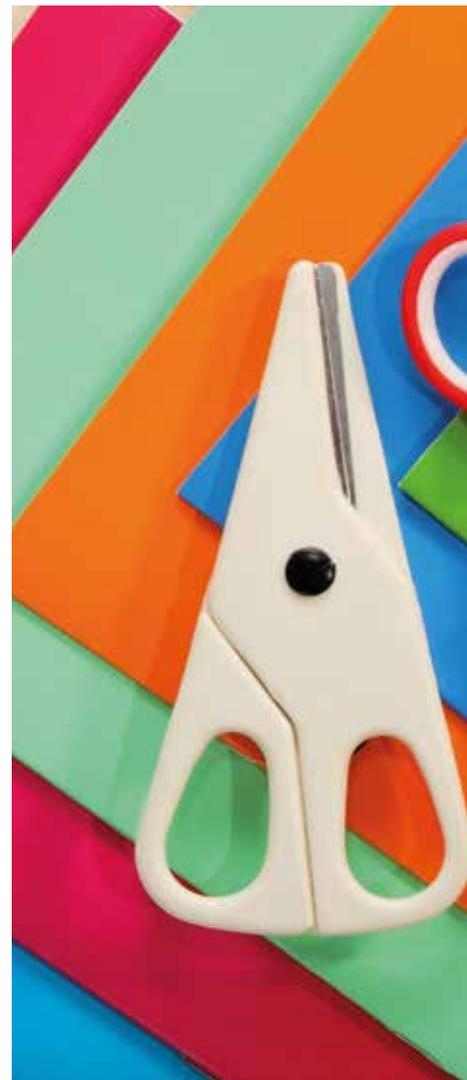
## FUNDING ISSUES

Increased National Insurance rates and pension contribution rises, as well as the usual inflationary costs such as staff increments, have all contributed to the funding crisis. The Government claims 'record funding' is going into the education budget, but this rise is to be expected given the massive rise in pupil numbers, argue the teaching unions.

'On top of all this,' explains Mr Bowen, 'schools now face an apprenticeship levy whereby they have to pay 0.5 per cent [of their annual pay bill]. It hits the final nail in the coffin.' The union also argues that schools have limited opportunities to employ apprentices and develop apprenticeships, so will struggle to recoup the amounts paid out.

A recent NAHT survey revealed that seven out of ten members said

**'We are seeing many schools cut their teaching assistant budgets and a few schools have even announced plans to close early on a Friday'**



their budgets would be untenable by 2019/20.

## POLITICAL BACKDROP

School funding became one of the defining issues of the general election, with three-quarters of a million voters changing their mind on who to vote for because of school funding issues, according to a Survation Poll, as reported in *The Guardian*.

The campaigns run by the teaching unions were instrumental in this shift, especially the development of the School Cuts website [www.schoolcuts.org.uk](http://www.schoolcuts.org.uk) – a joint collaboration between the NAHT, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ALT) that enables the public to type in their post-code and see the cuts, in cash terms, to their local school. (NUT and the ALT have since merged to form the National Education Union.)

Talking about the website, Mr Bowen explains, 'Ninety-eight per cent of schools have already seen or

## CASE STUDY: FRIDAY CLOSING

**Danemill School** in Enderby, Leicestershire is one of the schools that has announced plans to close early on a Friday because its budget won't stretch to a full week of teaching.

The change, outlined in a letter to parents, means that children will have to be picked up at 1.05pm, as opposed to 3.20pm, every Friday to 'allow teachers to have their PPA together on Friday afternoons'. The letter also explains, 'As you may be aware the Fair Funding Formula has resulted in schools receiving significantly less money in their annual budgets from the Government and Danemill is not an exception.'

Executive head teacher Dawn White and the head of school Tracey Lawrence, who signed the letter, said that the 'prime concern' is to provide children with 'quality first teaching', and this proposed adjustment aims to have

the 'least impact on your child's education'.

Parents have reportedly reacted with dismay at the plan which, if agreed, will come into force on 24 October with a 'limited number of enrichment activities provided free of charge in the first instance' and ending at 3.20pm to cope with the initial disruption. A parent told the *Leicester Mercury*, 'It is lunch time. How can they even suggest ending the school week at this time? It is unworkable madness.'

Danemill's academy status means it has more power in setting staff pay, the length of the school day and term times. However, its 24-place pre-school is not planning to close early on a Friday. Pre-school manager Ian Turner told *Nursery World*, 'Our hours will remain the same as we are delivering the 30-hour funding.'



will see cuts in their budget. If we look at National Funding Formula, there are slightly more winners than losers, I think. But even if you're a winner through the formula, if the overall pot is still going down, you still feel like a loser, which is one of the problems – people aren't happy with the formula because what they see is their budgets going down, but actually it's not so much always the formula that's to blame, it's the fact that there's not enough money in the first place, so it doesn't matter how it's carved up.'

As the summer holidays approached, teachers, parents, pupils and even celebrities stepped up their campaigns against the cuts – in mid-July, comedian and actor Steve Coogan delivered more than 30,000 messages, written by pupils, to Downing Street as part of an anti-cuts protest co-ordinated by parent-led group Save Our Schools.

The Government finally bowed to pressure and on 17 July announced an

extra £1.3bn in schools funding over two years – £416m in 2018-19 and £884m in 2019-20 – an ongoing commitment to a new National Funding Formula from April 2018, and a new formula for high-needs funding.

The increase means core funding for schools and high needs will rise by £2.6bn between this year and 2019-20, well below the £2bn a year that the NAHT argues is needed to address the real-terms cuts and make sure that no school loses out in the National Funding Formula.

Responding to the funding increase, Mr Bowen concludes, 'This will, at best, only partially alleviate rather than solve the problem for schools.'

*Nursery World* spoke to schools

around the country to find out how, as the new terms begins, they are responding to funding constraints (see boxes), in particular in the early years. Historically, nursery and Reception have often borne the brunt of cutbacks in school funding and now face the challenge – and sometimes unintended consequences – of the 30 hours free entitlement.

### THE 30 HOURS FREE ENTITLEMENT

School nursery classes have historically been quite expensive for schools to maintain. However, this has been deemed a worthwhile expense not only because of the benefits to early intervention and educational outcomes, but also because schools often have to compete for school places.

Fiona Carter, Early Excellence regional development manager in the south of England, says, 'Nurseries in schools are becoming more expensive to run, particularly if they're not full to capacity, which is the case with some of the schools I look after, particularly in the afternoon sessions. In some cases, we've had to have a debate about whether or not to keep them open in the afternoons at all,

but if they can apply some flexibility, and add top-up sessions, for example, or consider offering spaces for funded two-year-olds, they can maintain the provision.'

On the flip side, however, Ms Carter predicts that the 30 hours of free nursery provision may have a positive effect on some school nursery classes.

In Caversham, Reading, for example, she says there are very few nursery classes but the area has a strong non-maintained sector. Five miles across the town in Whitley, most primary schools have a nursery class. The schools have offered top-ups for children who are there in the morning to stay in the afternoon, but parents aren't always taking them up because they are not working.

'With the introduction of the 30 hours,' Ms Carter explains, 'it means the parents who were thinking about going back to work can potentially be offered free extra childcare and the school will be paid for them. However, the children who would potentially benefit most from longer periods in a nursery class will ➤'

not be eligible as the fund applies only to working families.’

## STAFF CUTS

There is a worrying trend to not employ qualified teachers in Reception and nursery classes. QTSs are subject to teachers’ pay and conditions so they are more expensive to employ. Ms Carter says, ‘Around 50 per cent of schools I work with are part of a multi-academy group. I get a lot of calls from them asking if they can, for example, employ two Reception teachers and one TA between three Year R classes in the unit. While it is absolutely best practice to have a qualified teacher in each Year R class, it is not a legal requirement in terms of academy status, so I would advise them to put in a robust CPD plan for the practitioner, who you could hope has some form of EY degree.’

## SUSTAINABILITY

Some schools are considering redefining themselves and changing the entire model of how they operate in order to ensure that their nurseries are able to offer the 30 hours and at the same time become sustainable.

In Norfolk, a number of maintained primary schools with nursery classes are considering changing the age range of their schools from three to 11 to five to 11. This move, which the schools need to consult on formally through a legal process, allows them to operate their nurseries – under the Community Powers (Section 27 of the Education Act 2002) – without a qualified teacher and working on a 1:8 ratio with Level 3 staff instead of

a ratio of 1:13. This permits schools to employ staff on a more flexible basis, outside of the standard school hours and term times.

‘Effectively,’ explains Norfolk childcare commissioning manager Jill Warwick, ‘this means that three- and four-year-old children coming into the nursery class would no longer be defined as pupils of the school, even though the nursery is still managed by the school governors and it is monitored by Ofsted as part of the school. However, if a school nursery takes under-twos, it needs a separate EY registration with Ofsted.’

This information is set out by the DfE in the document ‘Early years entitlements: operational guidance for local authorities and providers’ (April 2017). The assumption is that ratios cannot change during the day. Schools can either use 1:13 or 1:8, but cannot alter the ratio to 1:8 outside of school opening times if they are teacher-led during 9am-3pm.

Ms Warwick says, ‘A number of schools are thinking about changing to the 1:8 ratio instead of 1:13 because they can’t make it pay for the 30-hour offer. We are getting constant requests from schools to visit them to see how we can make the 30 hours work for them. There is also high demand from parents. Eighty-seven per cent of eligible parents in our survey said they wanted to take up the 30 hours. Our biggest problem in Norfolk is that 71 per cent of our settings are term-time-only. Schools that don’t open during the holidays will need to partner with another provider to offer the 30 hours all year round.’



## MORE INFORMATION

- [www.naht.org.uk/welcome/news-and-media/key-topics/funding/tas-teachers-and-training-all-at-risk-from-battered-school-budgets](http://www.naht.org.uk/welcome/news-and-media/key-topics/funding/tas-teachers-and-training-all-at-risk-from-battered-school-budgets)
- <http://survation.com/labour-party-now-polling-5-ahead-conservatives-public-say-theresa-may-resign-49-38>
- [www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jun/20/schools-theresa-may-electorate-cuts](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jun/20/schools-theresa-may-electorate-cuts)

Five settings in Norfolk, including two schools, successfully secured a share of the £100m pot of Government funding earmarked to build, expand and refurbish premises ahead of the 30 hours offer.

Among the schools is Bignold Primary School and Nursery in central Norwich, which is in the process of becoming an academy, and is building a new 24-place nursery to offer 30 hours childcare places.

## HIT HARD

The impact of the 30 hours offer varies greatly between schools and local authorities. In Islington, north London, schools with nursery classes have been particularly hit hard with the introduction of the policy.

In this borough, which has one of the highest incidences of child poverty in the country, some three-year-olds and all four-year-olds have historically benefited from 30 hours a week of free funding in nursery classes. However, with the move to the new entitlement, the council has been forced to withdraw the offer to families who do not fulfil the employment criteria.

An early years manager who wishes to remain anonymous tells *Nursery World*, ‘It’s a step backwards for our children and it’s devastating to reduce their hours by 50 per cent, when we know how much it’s benefiting children with the greatest needs. It has massive implication for their health, well-being and readiness for school. Just the fact that they won’t have a cooked meal three days a week, or access to outside physical



One poll suggests 750,000 people switched their voting preference in the last general election because of cuts to school funding

## CASE STUDY: REDUNDANCIES AND CPD CUTS

'While the budget has not been cut, costs have increased and continue to do so,' explains Judy Shaw, head teacher at Tuel Lane Infant and Nursery School in Sowerby Bridge, in the West Yorkshire borough of Calderdale. As a result, there have been staffing cuts and a curb on spending for curriculum resources, and it won't be long until it has to consider cuts to other budgets such as staff CPD, according to Miss Shaw.

'I'm having to be more creative than usual with the budget and, based on our three-year forecasts, which were set in April this year, we are just about secure for two years, with a very small carry-over, but by the third year we begin to show a deficit.'

'We manage our finances well and use financial benchmarking tools to ensure our use of funds has the best possible impact on the children and families in school, but these are worrying, uncertain times. How can I present strategic, costed school improvement plans to my governors, staff and parents if future funding is so uncertain? How can I reassure my staff that their jobs are secure and our parents that we can maintain the high standard of care and education we offer?'

From September, children will no longer benefit from the bought-in music specialist, and during the past 12 months,

the school governing body reluctantly undertook a staffing restructure with a loss of 45 hours of teaching assistant support and the redundancies of two staff. Plans to develop outdoor learning provision – the school has little access to gardens or safe outdoor space – have been drastically scaled down.

'This has a direct impact on the opportunities and experiences we can offer, the breadth of our curriculum and on the day-to-day care and support we offer our very young pupils,' Miss Shaw says.

'I also worry that it will have a serious impact on teachers' workloads because some of the hours we had to cut were there to support them in terms of workforce compliance.'

At this small, forward-thinking school, CPD has always been seen as a crucial investment, but now with significant cuts in accessible, affordable training provided by local authorities, Miss Shaw admits, 'I have had to pare back, really reluctantly, and it's one budget pot that might suffer going forward. I will not be able to protect it.'

As well as the on-costs associated with staff – increases to National Insurance, pensions and payment into an apprenticeship levy – local authorities are now charging for many services that were once free at the point

of delivery. 'Compared to three years ago, the costs are beginning to add up and the pressures are just beginning to surface. For example, when a child has attendance issues, it obviously has an impact on their well-being and their learning, so we need the support of the Education Welfare Service to work with families. It used to be free, but now we have to buy into it – an annual service level agreement costs us £1,200,' Miss Shaw says.

'Similarly, we now have to pay for educational psychology support for children with special educational needs – up to £500 per day. And recently, we've had to contribute to behaviour support and counselling for young children. There's even a rumour locally that we'll have to pay for our lollipop lady. All these kinds of costs we've not had to think about before. These are services that support children and families in the most challenging circumstances.'



As for the nursery class, which is heavily subsidised by the schools budget, Miss Shaw says, 'We are monitoring it carefully. It's sustainable in the immediate future but we have concerns about it into the second and third year of this budget. It is a high-quality setting with well-qualified staff and an asset to our local community, but it's dependent on per-pupil funding and the impact of the 30 hours offer which rolls out in September.'

'This has been difficult to administer, complicated to explain to parents and it's still unclear to us what the uptake will be.'

play. Instead, they are very likely to spend more time indoors on screens.

'The nursery class used to have 80 per cent full-time places and now it has gone down to around 20 per cent full-time. Many parents don't understand why it's happening and the process of applying for the additional hours is complex. Many of the families have one parent at work and the other looking after a child or at home.'

'To be offered a place, both parents need to be at work and the "second" parent has to be working 16 hours, but they can't do this if they don't

have childcare in the first place. It's also an administrative nightmare for schools.'

Cllr Joe Caluori, Islington Council's executive member for children, young people and families, says that 'for many years' the council has funded up to 80 per cent of children in primary school nursery classes (and some in Children's Centres) to benefit from a free full-time nursery class place. This covered all four-year-olds and most three-year-olds and included 416 children who were eligible for free school meals.

The council has applied success-

**'Many parents don't understand why it's happening and the process of applying for the additional hours is complex'**

fully for an exemption to the new 30-hour requirements, so that children already in a full-time place in the summer term this year can complete the academic year.

Mr Caluori says, 'The council has also been successful in protecting full-time places for about 250 of the most vulnerable children in the borough. However, we are very worried about the impact of these changes on children from poorer families, who are not eligible for free 30 hours places under the new regime and may fall further behind their peers as a result of this policy.' ■